**Beyond the Common Core: The Subtext Strategy**

**for 21st Century (Real World) Writing**

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Remember those playground days…when kids were choosing sides?

What were *you* thinking and feeling as your experience was unfolding?

That is, what was your \**subtext?*



Image from: <http://brollieboy.blogspot.com/2011/10/picking-teams.html>

**\*Subtext:** What people/characters are thinking and feeling (*inside their heads)*

From *Breakthrough to Meaning: Helping Your Kids*

*Become Better Readers, Writers and Thinkers* (Heinemann 2006)

**Subtexting for an Imagined Reader\*: A New Tool for Revision**

\* A member of your intended audience…someone who

may or may not have a vested interest in your topic

**The Process**

1. Create an imagined reader—the person who represents the audience for your piece. If writing for a specific person (e.g. the school’s principal), include what you actually know about her here. (Step 1 below)
2. Reread the piece *as* that reader, recording her subtext—what she is thinking as she reads.

3. Use the imagined reader’s subtext—her comments and questions--to guide the revision of the text. Then apply the Subtext Strategy as you review each draft. Stop when your imagine reader is fully satisfied.

Step 1: Creating an Imagined Reader **-** the intended audience for the piece we’ll be reviewing is 3rd, 4th and 5th graders.

**On your Subtext Worksheet (Subtexting for Imagined Readers)…**

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* *Sketch* (NOTE: We didn’t say “draw”!) an imagined reader in the middle of your page, between all the thought bubbles.

Include details in your sketch that tell what’s important about your reader. BECOMEthat reader…as if you were telling about yourself. Write these things around your sketch of yourself.

* + - * + What is your name? Your age? Your gender?
        + What about your life experiences? Personal connections to this issue/topic?
  + How comfortable are you with reading text like this? Are you a competent reader? Do you struggle? Prefer fiction? Nonfiction?
  + What words would you use to describe your personality (e.g. caring, hostile, thoughtful, angry, etc).
* NOTE: If your audience includes a group of individuals who are likely to have very diverse opinions, it is helpful to create and subtext for multiple readers.

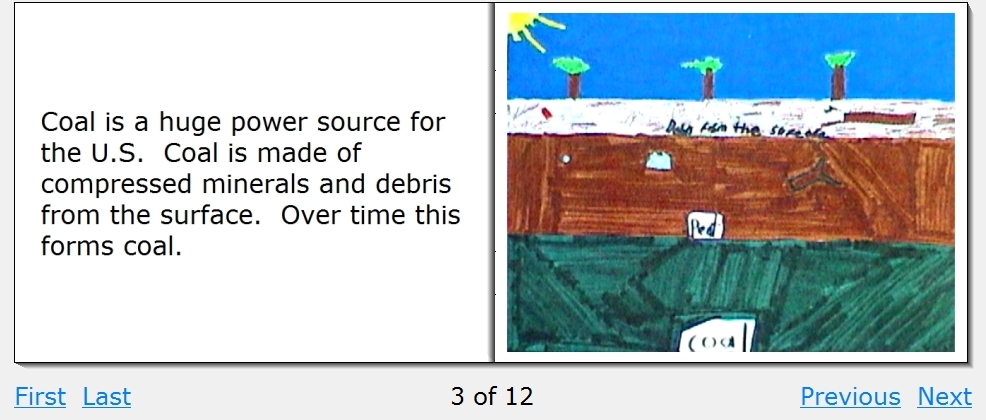
Step 2. Read and Subtext *as* Your Reader

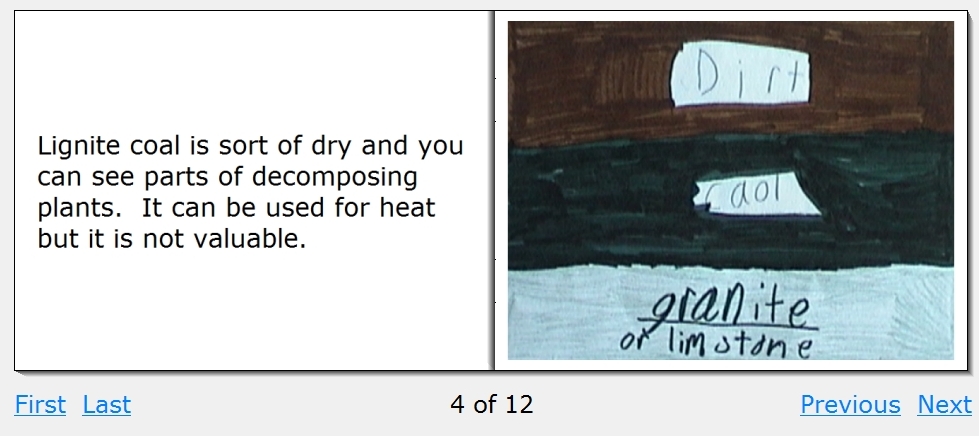
*BECOME* your imagined reader as you read pages the first few pages of *Coal,* a picture book coauthored by two 5th grade boys. Capture your subtext on your Subtext Bubble Sheet, recording what you are thinking and feeling about each part of the text (illustrations, too). Number the sections of text that correspond the subtext you write.

**Have a Go!**

Text: Excerpt from *Coal*  Genre: Informational Authors: Two 5th grade boys

Again, the iIntended audience for *Coal*: 3rd, 4th and 5th Graders



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Step 3. Use Your Reader’s Subtext to Guide Revisions…and repeat until s/he is satisfied. OR, for a fresh perspective, create a new reader and subtext for him.

**“Think Aloud” Demonstrations:**

**Essential for Introducing This Lesson**

Whole class “think aloud” lessons\* are absolutely essential in ensuring kids’ success with the Subtext Strategy:

* Sketch an imagined reader for a piece that *you* have written, one that represents the intended audience of your piece. Describe relevant details about your reader as you do.
* *Become* your reader and engage in a “think aloud” as you do, demonstrating what kids will do. Read the text and respond (e.g. *“That’s a good point…” “I wonder…” ”What does she mean by…?”*) demonstrating how to number the passage and record subtext.
* Create very different readers for a single text to demonstrate how responses will vary depending upon who reads it.

**Scaffolding Students**

As kids are learning to subtext, interact with them *as though they are their imagined readers*. For instance, if DeShawn has imagined a reader named “Marcus,” interact with him as Marcus. “So Marcus, what do you think of that illustration?...Write that on your bubble sheet.”

Once kids have generated subtext for their imagined readers:

* Demonstrate how to use readers’ questions to guide revisions.

\*NOTE: Think alouds should be repeated for those who struggle at first.

**So, what are the benefits of**

**Subtexting for Imagined Readers?**

**When subtexting for their imagined readers, our kids…**

* Developed a keen sense of audience, “making me feel like I’m in the other person’s shoes whenever I write…so I know what kind of questions they might have.” ~ Hannah
* Imagined readers (an invisible authors’ circle (Harste, Short & Burke 1996) who not only offered helpful feedback about problem areas, but affirmed their strengths. “(Your reader) can tell if it’s good or not too good” ~ Ashley
* Were more open to honest feedback from those readers than from peers and teachers. In fact, their readers were usually more critical; yet kids were responsive to their needs. “Because of the thoughts of my reader, I asked more Qs, better Qs, and fixed how long my sentences were.” ~ Justin
* Easily distinguished revising from editing. Subtexting required them to address the meaning of their texts, not just scan for punctuation and spelling problems. “Subtexting helped me realize all the changes we need to do.” ~ Taylor
* Made efficient use of work time (no lag time to organize response groups), which was particularly important when quickly needing to get a letter off to an important “resource” person.
* Soon realized that with the Subtext Strategy, they were never alone. It was as though the kids were actually conferring with their intended audience.
* Shared that “Subtexting makes you act (just) like the audience of your letter, or picture book, or interview question or plays…” ~ Will
* Became more planful about their writing. “I (am) more specific when I write letters and when I do questionnaires…It allow(s) me to write like I know what I’m going to write before I write it. ~Josh
* Realized that creating a successful text is a process, not a one draft deal. “Subtexting showed me you will never have a perfect piece…” ~ Keegan
* Grew to understand drafting. “I know that it won’t take one time to write a letter or play, and you work hard to improve.” ~ Ashley